



Dental  
Board of  
Australia

RETIRED

# GUIDELINES FOR SCOPE OF PRACTICE

June 2014

# GUIDELINES FOR SCOPE OF PRACTICE

The National Board develops registration standards which are approved by the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council and which define the requirements that applicants, registrants and/or students need to be registered and/or maintain registration. Guidelines are developed by the National Board to provide guidance to the profession and to help clarify the National Board's expectations on a range of issues including requirements of registration standards.

These guidelines provide further detail on the National Board's *Scope of practice registration standard* (the registration standard) and related matters. These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the registration standard, which establishes the scope of practice for all registered dental practitioners.

## Description of the dental profession

The delivery of dental care involves a team approach across different types of health care settings. Each division of registered dental practitioner provides dental health care that is based on their education, training and competence.

The divisions are:

- dentists<sup>1</sup>
- dental hygienists
- dental prosthetists
- dental therapists, and
- oral health therapists.

A dentist with specialised training may be registered as a dental specialist.

Dental assistants and dental technicians are non-registered members of the dental team who support dental practitioners in the delivery of dental services<sup>2</sup>.

Within each division, registered dental practitioners must only perform those dental procedures:

- for which they have been educated and trained in programs of study approved by the National Board, and
- in which they are competent.

Refer to the *Education* section of the guidelines for a definition of these programs.

The dental **profession's** scope of practice covers the full range of activities and responsibilities which individuals within the profession are educated, trained and competent to perform; whereas the scope of the **individual's** practice within the division in which they are registered will vary from practitioner to practitioner and may be more specifically defined than the scope of the dental profession.

All dental practitioners are members of the dental team who exercise autonomous decision-making within their particular areas of education, training and competence, to provide the best possible care for their patients. The registration standard does not allow dental hygienists, dental therapists and oral health therapists to practise as independent practitioners.

For some divisions, and in some areas of practice for some divisions, there is also the requirement of a structured professional relationship as described under dental practitioner divisions.

A team approach between dental practitioners is encouraged, so that patients are assured of receiving the most appropriate treatment from the dental practitioner who is most appropriate to provide it. The Board expects that the level and specific nature of the dental care provided will depend on:

- what is required for the safety and well being of the patient
- the treatment being provided, and
- the type of practice and the education, experience and competence of team members.

Dental practitioners must use sound professional judgment to assess their own (and other colleagues) scope of practice and they must only work within their area of education, training and competence. Each individual dental practitioner is responsible for the decisions, treatment and advice that they provide.

## Definition of dentistry

The following range of activities are considered to be the practice of dentistry and cover the widest range of any procedures that a person educated in dentistry can carry out.

Dentistry involves the assessment, prevention, diagnosis, advice, and treatment of any injuries, diseases, deficiencies, deformities or lesions on or of the human teeth, mouth or jaws or associated structures.

<sup>1</sup> The term dentist refers to dentists, dental specialists and/or a group of dentists unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> In some states, dental assistants have state radiography registration enabling them to take dental radiographs.

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## Dental practitioner divisions

**Dentists** work as independent practitioners and for the purpose of registration may practise all parts of dentistry within their competency and training. They provide assessment, diagnosis, treatment, management and preventive services to patients of all ages. The education requirement for a graduate dentist to be registered is a minimum four year full time education program approved by the National Board.

**Dental specialists** are dentists who have undertaken additional specialised training and education and are required to have completed a minimum of two years' general dental practice to be eligible for registration as a dental specialist. The 13 dental specialists types are:

- dento-maxillofacial radiology
- endodontics
- oral and maxillofacial surgery
- oral medicine
- oral pathology
- oral surgery
- orthodontics
- paediatric dentistry
- periodontics
- prosthodontics
- public health dentistry (community dentistry)
- special needs dentistry, and
- forensic odontology.

The National Board's *List of specialties* provides further detail of each specialty. The National Board's *Specialist registration standard* further outlines the requirements for registration as a dental specialist. The education requirement for a dental specialist is a minimum three years full time specialty education program approved by the National Board.

**Dental hygienists** provide oral health assessment, diagnosis, treatment, management, and education for the prevention of oral disease to promote healthy oral behaviours to patients of all ages. Their scope may include periodontal/gum treatment, preventive services and other oral care. Dental hygienists may only work within a structured professional relationship with a dentist. The education requirement for a graduate dental hygienist to be registered is a minimum two year full time or dual-qualified minimum three year full time education program approved by the National Board.

**Dental prosthetists** work as independent practitioners in the assessment, treatment, management and provision of removable dentures, and flexible, removable mouthguards used for sporting activities. The education requirement for a graduate dental prosthetist is a minimum two year full time education program approved by the National Board. Prerequisite for entry is a Diploma of Dental Technology (or equivalent).

Dental prosthetists may take impressions and records required for the manufacture of various types of splints, sleep apnoea/anti-snoring devices, immediate dentures and immediate additions to existing dentures. These procedures require written referrals to and from dentists and any appliance or device manufactured under such arrangement must be planned, issued and managed by the treating dentist.

Dental prosthetists educated and trained in a program of study approved by the National Board to provide treatment for patients requiring implant retained overdentures must enter into a structured professional relationship with a dentist before providing such treatment.

**Dental therapists** provide oral health assessment, diagnosis, treatment, management and preventive services for children, adolescents and young adults and, if educated and trained in a program of study approved by the National Board, for adults of all ages. Their scope may include restorative/fillings treatment, tooth removal, additional oral care and oral health promotion. Dental therapists may only work within a structured professional relationship with a dentist. The education requirement for a graduate dental therapist to be registered is a minimum two year full time or dual-qualified minimum three year full time education program approved by the National Board.

**Oral health therapists** are dual qualified<sup>3</sup> as a dental therapist and dental hygienist. They provide oral health assessment, diagnosis, treatment, management and preventive services for children and adolescents and, if educated and trained in a program of study approved by the National Board, for adults of all ages. Their scope may include restorative/fillings treatment, tooth removal, oral health promotion, periodontal/gum treatment, and other oral care to promote healthy oral behaviours. Oral health therapists may only work within a structured professional relationship with a dentist. The education requirement for a graduate oral health therapist to be registered is a minimum three year full time bachelor degree education program approved by the National Board.

<sup>3</sup> Dental practitioners registered as oral health therapists must have met the education requirements in the dual streams of dental hygiene and dental therapy.

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## Education

Within each division, registered dental practitioners must only perform those dental procedures for which they have been educated and trained in programs of study approved by the National Board. For the purposes of the registration standard and guidelines, programs of study approved by the National Board include:

- **approved programs of study** are programs accredited by the accreditation authority for the profession and approved by the National Board under the National Law. The approved programs are those which, upon successful completion lead to registration as a dental practitioner in the division or specialty in which study was completed
- **other assessment, examination or qualification** that qualifies a practitioner for general registration (section 53 of the National Law), specialist registration (section 57) limited registration with the Board (section 65) or endorsement (section 99), and
- **programs to extend scope<sup>4</sup>** (formerly known as add-on programs) are programs which can extend a dental practitioner's scope of practice by undertaking educational programs that the National Board has reviewed and approved. The programs to extend scope cover a range of skills which allow dental practitioners to extend their education, training and competence in certain areas and within the division in which they are registered.

Dental practitioners are also required to meet the National Board's requirements for continuing professional development.

**CPD programs** are programs that maintain, improve and broaden knowledge, expertise and competence, and develop the personal and professional qualities required throughout a dental practitioner's professional life.

**CPD activities alone cannot be used to extend scope of practice.**

The National Board has not specified an approval process for courses or course providers who provide CPD. The National Board's *Continuing professional development registration standard* and *Guidelines* detail the requirements and expectations of the National Board in relation to CPD.

## How might the Board use this guideline?

Registration standards, codes or guidelines may be used in disciplinary proceedings against health practitioners as evidence of what constitutes appropriate practice or conduct for the health profession under section 41 of the National Law.

## Other legislative / regulatory frameworks

In addition to complying with the scope of practice requirements set by the National Board, dental practitioners may also work in accordance with workplace agreements and should be mindful of other regulatory requirements including a dental practitioners' capacity to possess, prescribe/supply and administer medications, perform radiographic procedures, treatment planning and referral.

## Authority

These guidelines have been developed by the Dental Board of Australia (the National Board) under section 39 of the National Law

## Definitions

National Law means the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as in force in each state and territory.

## References

Dental Board of Australia, *Scope of practice registration standard*

Dental Board of Australia, *Specialist registration standard*

Dental Board of Australia, *Continuing professional development registration standard*

Dental Board of Australia, *Guidelines on continuing professional development*

Dental Board of Australia, *Fact sheet – Programs to extend scope<sup>5</sup>*

All documents referred to in this guideline are published on the National Board's website.

<sup>4</sup> The process of approval for these programs is under review by the Board. The current approved add-on programs remain in force at this time.

<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4.

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## Review

**Date of issue:** 30 June 2014

**Date of review:** The Board will review these  
guidelines at least every three years

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